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ABSTRACT

The paper describes the need for increased training in services for learning disabled (LD) college students, noting large increases in numbers of LD students attending college. The role of special education teacher trainers in serving this population is stressed. Training roles are considered for special education teacher trainers in direct service and leadership training. Approaches to training are said to require cross-disciplinary efforts with input from counseling, school psychology, higher education, and special education, as well as rehabilitation. Direct service personnel competencies are seen to include assessment of adults, implementation of academic and learning strategies interventions, individual and group counseling, and consultation with college faculty. Leadership personnel require competencies in applied research and program evaluation. (CL)

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THE SPECIAL EDUCATOR'S ROLE IN TEACHER TRAINING FOR PERSONNEL WORKING WITH LEARNING DISABLED COLLEGE STUDENTS

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The Special Educator's Role in Teacher Training for Personnel Working with Learning Disabled College Students

As learning disabled (L.D.) students are currently the largest growing segment of the disabled college student population, there is a significant need for trained personnel to develop, implement, and evaluate college programs for this population. Many postsecondary institutions are presently in the process of program development resulting in the need for an increased number of trained staff to both coordinate these programs and provide direct service to the L.D. student. This paper will describe the critical need for increased training efforts in this area and will stress the importance of input from special education teacher trainers in research, technical assistance, personnel preparation as well as direct service issues.

NEED

L.D. Students Seek College Support Services

Based upon mandates of Section 504 of the Federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973 which stipulates that "no qualified handicapped person shall, on the basis of handicap, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or otherwise be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity which receives or benefits from Federal assistance." (Federal Register, 1977, p. 2678), many learning disabled students are seeking full implementation of this statement in college settings (Gerber, 1981). Additionally, the availability of support services at the secondary level has contributed to the expectation that continued service will be provided in postsecondary environments (Vetter, 1983).

The growing numbers of L.D. students seeking college admission encouraged Madeline Will of the Office of Special Education to stress the need for improvement in services designed to assist handicapped students in transition from high school to institutions of higher education (Education of the Handicapped, 1984). A survey by White, Alley, Deshler, Schumaker, Warner, and Clark (1982), reported that 67% of young adults diagnosed as learning disabled while in public school had plans for postsecondary education. In fact, the number of L.D. students entering college has more than doubled since 1978 (Education of the Handicapped Amendments, 1983). Of even greater concern to many college personnel are the sixteen million adults with learning disabilities who are characterized by Fielding (1981) as the largest pool of undereducated but high potential persons in our country today.

L.D. College Programming

The increased numbers of L.D. students attending college has resulted in a rapid development of service delivery programs designed to meet the needs of this population of disabled students. There are now estimated to be 800 such postsecondary programs with more being created each year. These numbers are remarkable as L.D. college programming is little more than a decade old. This expansion of L.D. college programs has resulted in Peterson's Guides decision to publish its first L.D. college directory in 1985.

Program development has been enhanced by a number of additional factors. State legislation such as Chapter 275 in California (Ostertag, Baker, Howard, and Best, 1982) and Chapter 344 in Massachusetts, has encouraged admission and programming initiatives by institutions of higher education. Recent direct funding of

programs in states such as New Jersey and Connecticut as well as support for program development from the Office of Special Education have speeded the creation of L.D. services in the mid-1980's.

Building on a Weak Foundation

Johnston (1984) noted that as a result of community demands and government legislation, secondary schools have developed programs for the handicapped which are often inappropriate and poorly planned. Similarly, the Inspector General noted that ". . . special education programs are weak at the junior high and high school levels." (Education of the Handicapped Amendments, 1983, p. 19). There is growing concern that postsecondary programs will be faced with dilemmas similar to those at the secondary level. Problems are particularly apparent with respect to the unresolved issues of diagnosis and identification, and the consequent planning of appropriate and meaningful instruction. It is, therefore, not surprising that a major text in L.D. college programming notes that many "so-called" programs do not actually meet the needs of post-secondary learning disabled students (Mangrum & Strichart, 1984) nor that Chandler (1985) finds the search for adequate L.D. college programs frustrating at best.

Training Needs

In a national survey of personnel needs, Smith-Davis, Burke, and Noel (1984) noted serious concerns regarding the quantity and quality of secondary special education programs and that the shortage of qualified personnel is the major impediment to improvement. They go on to note that higher education faculties are often trained and experienced exclusively with elementary aged children and are themselves ill equipped to provide training regarding handicapped

adolescents and adults. This limitation is readily evident in postsecondary settings.

The Chairperson of the Association on Handicapped Student Service Programs in Postsecondary Education's (AHSSPPE) L.D. Interest Group, states that the ". . .number of learning disabled students at the college level is growing dramatically nationally and there are few service providers who are trained to meet the needs of these students." (personal communications, L. Block, February 22, 1985). The Executive Director of AHSSPPE, the major organization for personnel working with the handicapped at the college level, adds that "Many of the people being hired for these positions do not have relevant training or experience to fulfill the many responsibilities associated with these programs." (personal communication, J. Jarrow, January 21, 1985). It is even noted that personnel running L.D. college programs frequently are not trained specifically with learning disabled students (Mangrum & Strichart, 1984).

In spite of the large numbers of learning disabled students entering higher education, only 9% of Directors of Disabled Student Services are trained in special education. It is, therefore, not surprising that they perceive training and coursework in L.D. as a major priority (Blosser, 1984). Others note the need for personnel knowledgeable about assessment, program implementation and program evaluation (Johnston, 1984; Mellard & Deshler, 1984).

As L.D. college programs are developed to service the increasing numbers of learning disabled students seeking postsecondary experiences, the need to train qualified personnel will become critical. It is encumbent upon special education teacher trainers to take a major role in meeting this challenge.

THE ROLE OF SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHER TRAINERS

Personnel from Disabled Student Services (DSS) Offices at post-secondary institutions typically have responsibility for L.D. college programming as a result of their traditional roles with physically handicapped, blind and hearing impaired college students. DSS personnel are generally trained and experienced in the areas of counseling and guidance, rehabilitation counseling, and college student personnel/higher education (Blosser, 1984). We posit that learning disabled college students, like learning disabled public school students, primarily require special education interventions. Furthermore, personnel who are knowledgeable about and/or are competent in L.D. identification, screening, diagnosis, program development, intervention, and evaluation are needed for personnel preparation, and research as well as in direct service roles. It has been documented that the kind of training currently provided is not appropriate to meet this need. It is now necessary for learning disability teacher trainers to seize this role and provide active leadership in the development of L.D. college programs.

Direct Service

Salend, Salend, and Yanok (1985), in a recent issue of Teacher Education and Special Education, make a forceful case for expanding the role of special education teacher trainers to include the provision of assistance to postsecondary institutions serving L.D. students. They note that special education faculty have training and experience which could be extremely helpful in implementing L.D. college programs. It should be evident from the data cited previously that such expertise would not only be helpful but is

critical. Salend, Salend and Yanok (1985) specify roles for special educators including advocacy, modifying instructional programs, consulting with colleagues regarding classroom alternatives, advising L.D. college students, promoting positive campus attitudes and assisting in service delivery.

At the 1985 meeting of the L.D. Interest Group of the Association on Handicapped Student Service Programs in Postsecondary Education, the vast majority of college L.D. coordinators strongly voiced their desire for such input. However, a number described their unsuccessful attempts to get such help from special education faculty members within their institutions.

A few L.D. college programs have actually been developed by and operated out of special education programs. This approach not only focuses the skills of special education faculty on direct service activities but also has implications for teacher training. The following section will describe training roles regarding both direct service and leadership personnel.

Personnel Preparation

Transitional programming for the handicapped has been a major priority of the Office of Special Education's Division of Personnel Preparation. Almost all of these efforts have focused on the transition to work rather than to postsecondary education. Special education teacher trainers have somehow "missed" this significant population of handicapped individuals attending their own institutions.

Learning disabled students on college campuses not only offer an opportunity for special educators to provide service but also provide many vehicles for training activities. There are now needs for

diagnostic evaluations, tutoring, teaching and counseling of the handicapped at our own institutions. The ever present struggle to find appropriate student teaching, practicum or internship placements within a specific geographical area can now be somewhat alleviated by the use of L.D. college programs as fieldwork sites.

The most critical issue for teacher trainers, however, is the growing number of jobs available for personnel trained to work with L.D. adults. As increasing numbers of learning disabled students graduate from high school and L.D. adults discover support services in colleges able to meet their needs, L.D. college programs will continue to grow and seek qualified direct service personnel.

In addition to direct service roles, there is tremendous need for L.D. college leadership personnel who can develop and administer such programs, design and implement appropriate assessment instruments for this population, and do research and program evaluation, lending direction to this rapidly developing service delivery area.

Approaches to Training

Learning disabled college students typically manifest an array of academic problems including deficits in the areas of reading, writing, oral language, math, and study skills. It is also apparent that social- emotional traits are, at least, of equal concern. Social characteristics which have been identified include low self-esteem, dependency, poor attention, emotional instability, and social imperception resulting in communication difficulties (Polloway, Smith & Patton, 1984). These combined needs suggest that interventions for this population must be varied and comprehensive. Training programs, therefore, must be crossdisciplinary with input from counseling, school psychology, higher education and

rehabilitation, as well as special education. Competencies for direct service personnel include assessment (academic, social vocational) of adults, implementing academic and learning strategies interventions, individual and group counseling, and consultation with college faculty. Additionally, leadership personnel will need to have skills in applied research, and program evaluation.

SUMMARY

As learning disabled students are increasingly seeking postsecondary education, additional trained personnel will be required to meet this demand. The implementation of a cross-disciplinary training effort is suggested as critical to the development of programs for this population of college or univeristy students. Not only is there a serious shortage of special educators trained to work with L.D. adults, but many such programs are housed in and run by disabled services personnel who often have limited associations with special education faculty.

Questions regarding program development and service delivery must be addressed if the "field" is to avoid replicating the same haphazard development seen in secondary programs for the learning disabled. In doing so we need to develop new models for evaluating learning disabled adults which will provide constructuve information directly to these students. The paucity of research and program evaluation efforts must be alleviated and this effort must be initiated by special educators in collaboration with related services personnel. Finally, Special education teacher trainers must be willing to utilize their expertise in technical assistance efforts to enhance programming for L.D. college students.

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